

SPIDER PREDATORS OF REPTILES AND AMPHIBIA:—Predation of vertebrates by spiders in not uncommon. In Australia, Whistling Spiders (*Selenotypus plumipes*, Theraphosidae) have been reported dragging a young chicken 50 feet from its enclosure and then attempting to drag it into a small burrow 1.25 inches in diameter (Chisholm, 1919).

Predation of reptiles is less known. Two cases reported from Australia are that of the Whistling Spiders (*Selenocosmia* and *Selenotypus* spp.) feeding on the frog *Heliophorus centralis* (Main and Main, 1956) and the Funnel-web spider (*Atrax formidabilis*) feeding on *Hyla* (= *Litoria*) *caerulea* (McKeown, 1952). Those predators, however, are large powerful trapdoor spiders that would seize prey on the ground. Predation of vertebrates by web building spiders is also known. Best known are the very strong webs of Golden Orb-Weavers (*Nephila*) that snare and kill small birds but evidently do not consume them.

McKeown (1952) shows a mouse caught and hoisted in the web of a Redback Spider (*Latrodectus hasseltii*). He also reported cases of a Funnel-web spider (*Atrax robustus*) taking a chicken, Water spiders (*Dolomedes*) taking fish, and web-building spiders taking small native birds, bats, and reptiles. A skink, *Lygosoma*, had also been taken by a Redback. One account discussed a black snake that had been tied head to tail and killed by an adult Redback spider. The spider's young were evidently feeding on the snake.

Two cases of Redback Spider predation on reptiles have been noted in our collections. A female Redback spider had built a web in the fold of a blanket left hanging on a clothes line to dry, presumably for some days. On removing the blanket, two Wall Skinks (*Cryptobelpharus virgatus*) were found dead and partially consumed in the web. (My nomenclature for reptiles and amphibians follows Cogger, 1983) In the second case (Fig. 1), the web of the female Redback had been built close to the ground and it had snared a Verreaux's Skink (*Anomalopus verreauxii*). Apparently, the very sticky lower vertical lines of the Redback had trapped the skink and lifted its head high off the ground. The spider then moved repeatedly to the underside of the skink to inflict its bite (arrow shows blood stained scar). The spider did not consume the lizard but merely immobilised it. Raven and Gallon (1987) suggested that the Redback is an introduced spider and hence may rank along with *Bufo marinus* in its effects on native vertebrates.

A third instance, observed personally, was that of a Wolf Spider and a young frog (*Litoria lesueuri*). I had caught, identified and placed the frog back on the rocks of a creek bed. Immediately, a large female *Lycosa lapidosa* jumped onto the frog, impaling it on its fangs. The live spider and its

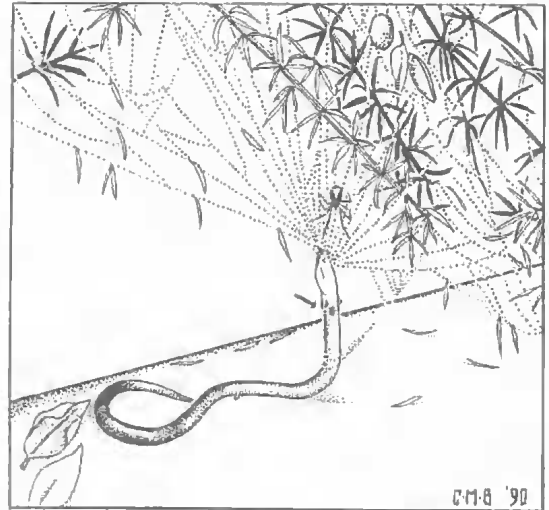


FIG. 1. Redback and snared Verreaux's Skink.

prey were taken in a vial back to camp where the vial was opened. Only a grey liquid mound remained of the frog, no hard tissue could be felt with a wooden probe. Little more than five minutes had passed since the spider had seized the frog.

Literature Cited

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